

Spring

2026

Issue

35

# Panoply

Department of English and Technical Communication

## Inside This Issue

**Exploring Human  
Connection** page 5

**Leading Technical  
Communication in  
Bangladesh** page 8

**Revising the  
MS in Technical  
Communication** page 10



Missouri S&T

Mathew Goldberg

# Chair's Letter

Writing this letter during one of the most pleasant autumn days I have experienced throughout my 13 years in Missouri, I am reminded of a line from one of my favorite authors, Henry David Thoreau: "The seasons and all their changes are in me." In terms of welcoming change, 2025 was an exciting year for the English and Technical Communication department, as this issue of Panoply will show.

The ETC department is working on redesigning our MS degree after twenty years. Missouri S&T's Ignition Grants for Sustainable Educational Transformation (IGSET) provided \$72,000 in funding to help develop courses that can be applied toward these efforts. We're eager to bring our program to working professionals and others interested in developing new, highly marketable skills in an accessible asynchronous online environment.

In addition, we celebrate the rich work of our faculty. Dr. Joshua Coonrod brings his love of writing and communication to his public speaking, composition, and popular horror film courses. Dr. David Wright has been researching augmented reality using the Apple Vision Pro. His team studies the use of AR for routine tasks compared with known devices such as smartphones and laptops.

Early in 2025, Dr. Kathryn Northcut traveled to Dhaka, Bangladesh, as a Fulbright Specialist. She spent several weeks at North South University leading grant-writing workshops, applying her technical communication expertise to a global audience.

In addition, MS students Nadia Ahmadi, Bahar Gholinejad-Pirbazari, and Saba Moazeni describe key questions about communication that brought them to Missouri S&T and our master's degree program in technical communication. Nadia's experience teaching English in Iran showed her to appreciate clarity in communication. In governmental forms, for example, clarity is key to empowerment. Bahar focuses on digital communication accessibility in Iran, hoping to improve online learning access. Meanwhile,



Dr. Kathryn Cornell Dolan, a food studies scholar, was newly elected chair of the Department of English and Technical Communication in 2025.

Saba studies Iranian traditions, such as use of color and patterns, as a necessary element in contemporary design. We appreciate our students and look forward to where these interests will take them!

Dr. Kristine Swenson has returned two full-time faculty after having been chair of the ETC department since 2009. Thank you very much, Kris, for all your years serving the department with such grace and dedication. You're a tough act to follow!

Finally, Dr. Brett Young joined the ETC department in Fall 2025 as an assistant teaching professor. She teaches composition and our world literature survey. Welcome to the team!

We're excited to share all of this and more of the department's news with you. Please return the favor by sharing your news with us. Feel free to email us, drop by the Humanities and Social Sciences building, or post to our LinkedIn account. We'd love to hear from you!

**Have a wonderful 2026!**  
**KCD**

# Swenson Concludes 16 Years as Chair

During her long tenure as department chair, Dr. Kristine Swenson provided essential leadership to Missouri S&T's Department of English and Technical Communication. She never planned on being an administrator or aiming for the chair's role, but timing and circumstance led her there, and persistence kept her there through years of change. She stepped away from the role on July 31, 2025, ready to return to full-time teaching and research.

Administration, she says, was something she resisted. Yet the department's circumstances left her the most obvious candidate: senior faculty ahead of her had retired, left, or passed away, and junior colleagues were not yet ready to lead. She stepped in as interim chair in 2009, and sixteen years later, she was still leading.

When Swenson became permanent department chair in 2010, she didn't have a grand vision. She simply wanted to support the department's faculty and students and develop courses that would meet the shifting needs of the job market.

She sees her legacy in the careers she helped shape, the department's adaptation to new technologies, and her insistence that communication matters on a campus that often defines itself by engineering. "I am most proud of enabling other people's careers," she said. "It was their work, but I liked clearing obstacles so they could do it."

Balancing the chair's role with teaching, research, and family life was grueling. Swenson lived in Chesterfield, commuting back and forth while raising her son and serving as stepmother to three other boys. The teaching load was lighter, but the days rarely ended. "I just got into a zone and did it."

"I'm a type A personality, and I'm a nineteenth-centuryist," she added with a laugh. "Dr. Dolan and I joke about this. She's an Americanist; I'm a Victorianist. People sometimes choose their research areas to match their personalities. Nineteenth-



Dr. Swenson conducting class in 2002. Throughout her long career as a professor and chair, Swenson has mentored many students and colleagues. Her influence on young women has been especially significant.

centurists tend to be earnest, get-your-work-done, keep-your-nose-clean, try-to-make-things-better, small-steps compromisers. You just do it."

Her scholarship as a literature professor often met her life at close range. Writing about neurodiversity and nineteenth-century medicine grew from parenting a child on the autism spectrum and from a historian's curiosity about where ideas come from.

Her route into academia feels natural in hindsight. She began college as a biology major planning for medicine before realizing language and narrative were home.

The foundation started even earlier than that. Her father, a Lutheran minister, modeled teaching from the pulpit. Her mother, an English and history teacher, quite literally taught her to read by running a finger under the words of hymns as they sang together in church.

When asked whether she noticed shifts in students' needs or strengths during her years as chair, Swenson pointed first to technology. Students kept arriving more fluent in digital tools, and the department had to adjust. Swenson felt that shift personally. She recalled taking an online course years ago to build her own HTML website, investing months in a page that was quickly outpaced by university-managed sites and simple builders. "It took me months to make a site that was obsolete in a year," she said. The experience convinced her that time spent on technical upkeep was better left to others, freeing her to focus on the reading and thinking she valued most.

Turning from technology to people, Swenson reflected on another change that reshaped the department: the presence and later decline of international students.

"It was great for our undergraduates in the middle of Missouri to be in classes with, and be taught by, people from all over the world," she said. "That is really important. Many of them won't have those opportunities again. With Zoom and Google Translate, people may think they don't need to learn other languages or visit other cultures. But that doesn't help you recognize the diversity of cultures on the planet, or the commonality within diversity.

"One of the real disappointments to me in recent years has been the difficulty of bringing graduate

students here because of visa and financial barriers. There was a time when we could support them well, but not anymore. For undergraduates at Rolla, it's a loss that there will be fewer international students and probably fewer international faculty on campus."

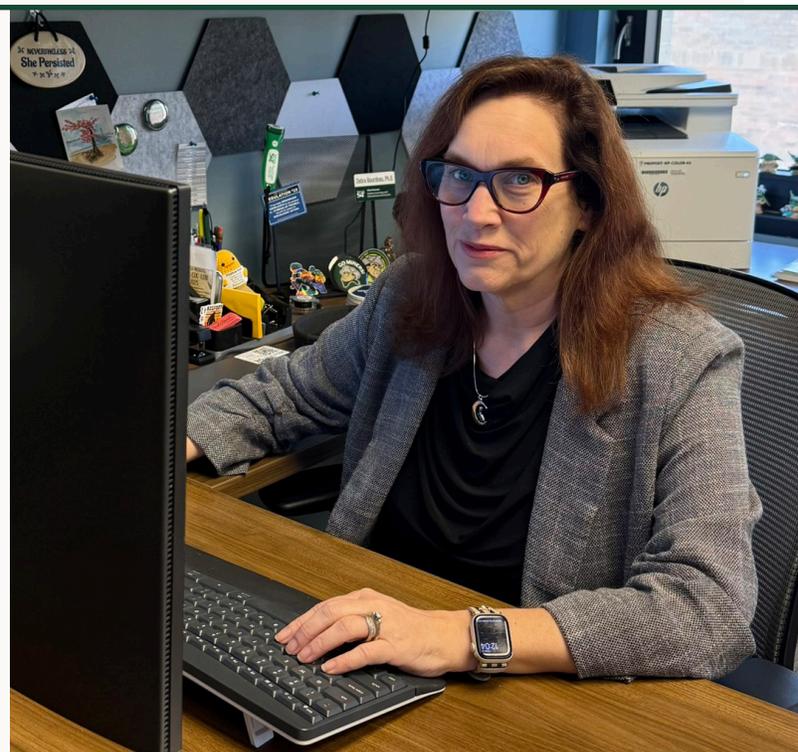
On a STEM-heavy campus, she reminds students that their work travels: communication skills, she tells them, often matter more than technical ones. "Engineers and scientists need us," she said. The message is practical and confident. Learn to speak to engineers and scientists. Understand their perspective. Carry that fluency into jobs and communities.

Stepping down has given her time to return to teaching and research, and she is relishing the chance to be present in the classroom again. The advice to her successor, Dr. Dolan, is straightforward: Do not try to do it alone. "The department is a body of people. You are just its representative." And for students or faculty who aspire to follow her path up the administrative ladder, Swenson says to take it slowly. Administration, she insists, is most effective when it's built on a foundation of teaching, research, and service. Skipping steps, she warns, produces administrators out of touch with the realities of the classroom.

Leadership, in the end, is simple to her. "It's group work. Collaboration. Talking to people. Leadership is about relationships."

## New Vice Provost for Online Learning

Dr. Debra Bourdeau joined Missouri S&T as Vice Provost of Online Learning and Educational Innovation on April 1, 2025. She also holds a faculty appointment as Associate Teaching Professor in the Department of English and Technical Communication. As vice provost, she will lead efforts to redesign and expand the university's online undergraduate and graduate programs, drawing on her experience in digital learning leadership at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University Worldwide.



# Professor Goldberg Explores Connection in Night Watch

Mathew Goldberg, an associate teaching professor in Missouri S&T's Department of English and Technical Communication, explores what it means to seek human connection in his debut short story collection, *Night Watch* (2025). The stories follow characters at various stages of life, each facing the same quietly urgent question: how do we understand ourselves and others more fully?

"They're all about people searching for who they are and trying to find other people," Goldberg says. "Like emotionally. I think that's behind all of them."

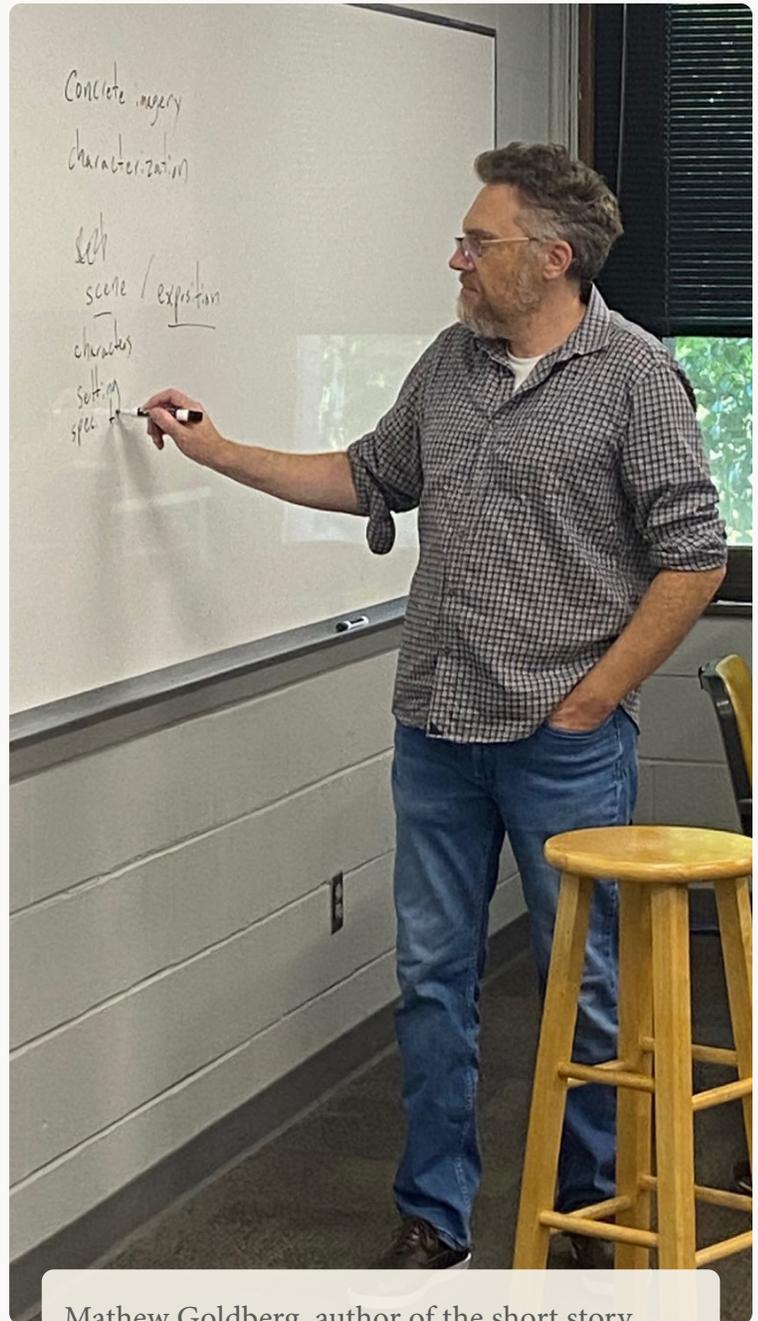
For Goldberg, every story begins with character. Plot, structure, and setting emerge only after he understands the people at the center of his narratives. "In any genre, what separates good fiction from mediocre fiction is strong characters," he explains.

But crafting complex characters within the constraints of a short story poses a unique challenge that he finds both demanding and rewarding. "There's a certain grace to a short story," he says. "You have such an economy of space and language. It can resonate with a reader in a way that's different from a novel. A novel you live with; in a story, there's more subtext; it's between the lines."

To create that resonance, Goldberg spends time imagining his characters' inner lives far beyond what appears on the page: their happiest moments, the fears they won't name, the histories that shape them. Even if those details stay invisible, they give the stories an emotional foundation that readers can feel.

That depth of character development is enabled by a working method he keeps simple but disciplined: he sets aside two- to three-hour focused blocks, silences his phone, turns off Wi-Fi, and writes to music without lyrics, all to free himself from expectations and let him settle into the work.

*Night Watch* brings together both new and older stories, highlighting Goldberg's evolution as a writer.



Mathew Goldberg, author of the short story collection *Night Watch*, lectures to his creative writing class at Missouri S&T. His teaching and writing continually inform each other. "I do all the exercises with my students," he says. "Sometimes stuff comes out of those exercises that influences my own writing." The collection won the 2025 Spokane Prize for Short Fiction.

continued on page 7

# New Composition Professor Studies Young Adult Literature

## Exploring How Young Adult Fiction Reimagines the Victorian Past

Once upon a time, Dr. Brett Young dreamed of writing novels. Today, she brings that same creative spirit into her classrooms at Missouri University of Science and Technology, where she teaches students to express themselves effectively in writing and opens the world of literature to them. Young joined the Department of English and Technical Communication in August 2025 as an assistant teaching professor specializing in composition.

In 2014, Young earned her PhD in English from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, focusing on nineteenth-century British literature and children's studies. Her dissertation, "Contemplating 'What If?': Allohistoric Reconstructions of Victorian Restrictions in Young Adult Steampunk," explored how young adult steampunk fiction reimagines the social limits of the Victorian era. Analyzing works such as Scott Westerfeld's *Leviathan* trilogy and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, she showed how speculative "what-if" narratives empower characters to resist historical constraints and envision more inclusive futures.

Her work helped define steampunk's place within children's and young adult literary studies.

After earning her doctorate, Young built a strong foundation in composition pedagogy. From 2016 to 2018, she taught basic writing part-time at both Missouri State University and Missouri S&T. She later joined the faculty at Valdosta State University in Georgia, where she taught a variety of composition and literature courses from 2018 to 2025 and served as first-year composition coordinator from 2022 to 2025. Through these experiences, she strengthened her commitment to helping students develop proficiency and confidence in their writing.

Since returning to Missouri S&T, she has taught sections of English 1120 Exposition and Argumentation, English 1160 Writing and Research, and English 1231 World Literature I: From Beginnings to the Renaissance.

Young's passion for teaching began while she was earning her master's degree in English at Missouri State in Springfield. As a graduate assistantship, she



Dr. Brett Young leads a writing class, guiding students through writing as a clear, manageable process.

“fell in love with teaching,” and since then she has spent nearly twenty years in the classroom. Her inspiration comes from “really just students — students every day.”

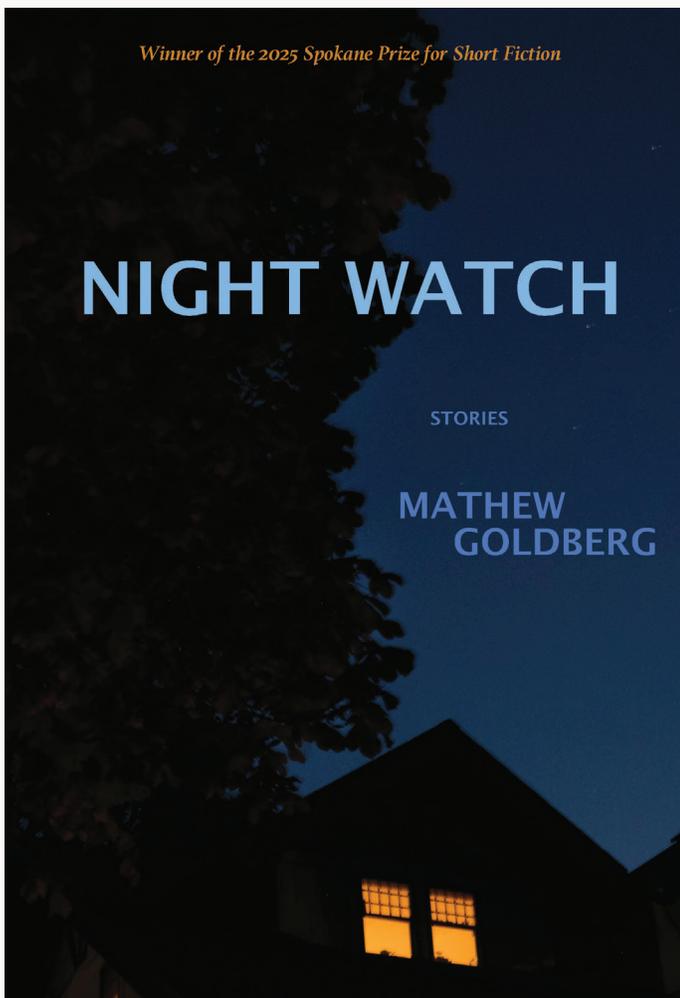
Her teaching philosophy is grounded in “transparency and practice.” Because many of her students come from STEM fields, she breaks the writing process into clear, manageable steps. “We think of writing as a creative, organic function, and it is once you know how to do it,” she explained. “But before you know how to do it, there are rules and guidelines you can follow.”

She wants her students to engage with writing in new ways, approaching structure as something to explore rather than endure. Her goal is to help them see writing assignments not as “the worst thing that could possibly happen in a class,” but as “a chance to leave the class with the tools to develop an argument and make writing work for them.”

Young’s research centers on young adult literature, especially how contemporary authors revisit Victorian ideas and anxieties through speculative genres such as steampunk and neo-Victorian fiction. She believes that literature for children and young adults is profoundly influential, shaping who young readers become and helping them understand the world, even when it is dark. “You ask almost anybody what their favorite five or ten books are,” she said, “and almost all of them will include something from their childhood.”

Beyond the classroom, Young describes her return to Missouri as “almost like coming home,” appreciating how close it brings her to family and friends. She enjoys cooking, knitting, and crocheting, and, like many in the field of literature, she is almost always reading.

continued from page 5



“I wanted to include newer stuff because it represents where I am right now,” he says. “And then to look back over stories that I liked and really wanted to revisit.”

Revisiting earlier stories meant approaching them with fresh eyes. The stories remained anchored in their original time periods, but they were adjusted where things no longer felt quite right. “I wasn’t necessarily updating the timeframe,” he says. “Like the ones set in the past, I was going to keep in the past. But some things wouldn’t really be relevant still. And my attachment to them would change maybe a little bit too.”

Despite their differences in plot, setting, and characters, all the stories in *Night Watch* share a common thread: the difficulty and beauty of human connection. Goldberg believes that theme feels especially resonant today. “It’s more common now, with the pandemic and everything, that we feel disconnected,” he says. “It’s easier to communicate, but harder to feel in touch with people.”

Through *Night Watch*, Goldberg offers readers moments that speak to our longing for connection. They are reminders that, even in an increasingly fragmented world, we continue to reach across the distance, hoping someone is reaching back.

# Northcut Leads Work in Bangladesh



Dr. Kathryn Northcut, professor of technical communication, spent several weeks in Bangladesh as a Fulbright Specialist. She led grant-writing workshops at North South University in Dhaka.

What do a private university in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and a public university in Missouri have in common? Dr. Kathryn Northcut. A professor and grant writer at Missouri S&T, she has built a career in technical communication that combines teaching, consultation, and research. That expertise recently led to an international opportunity through the Fulbright Specialist Program.

Early in the Spring 2025 semester, Northcut spent several weeks in Dhaka, working with faculty members at North South University (NSU). The Fulbright Specialist Program, founded in 2001, supports short-term academic and professional projects around the world. While many participants

choose more common destinations in Europe or South America, Northcut accepted NSU's request for assistance in strengthening grant-writing skills among its faculty.

NSU housed Northcut in an on-campus apartment, making it convenient to collaborate closely with faculty and staff. Although Dhaka has problems with pollution, trash, and poverty, the university had a beautiful campus that Northcut enjoyed exploring. When leaving campus, she usually had someone walk with her or had a driver. She was able to attend several local events, one of which was a conference called "Toilet: The future of Sanitation," where she saw reports on some of the extensive work being done to address issues of hygiene and safety across the global South, by the people who live there.



Northcut's primary responsibility was to lead grant-writing workshops offered through each of NSU's four colleges. Faculty completed preparatory readings before each session and participated in activities tailored to their disciplinary needs. "Most NSU faculty are experienced in writing proposals already. All I did was give them some fresh examples, and practice using some analytic tools that were new to many of them. Just like in my proposal writing course at S&T, they practiced critique," she said. "And they were encouraged to create a community with their colleagues for collaboration and support."

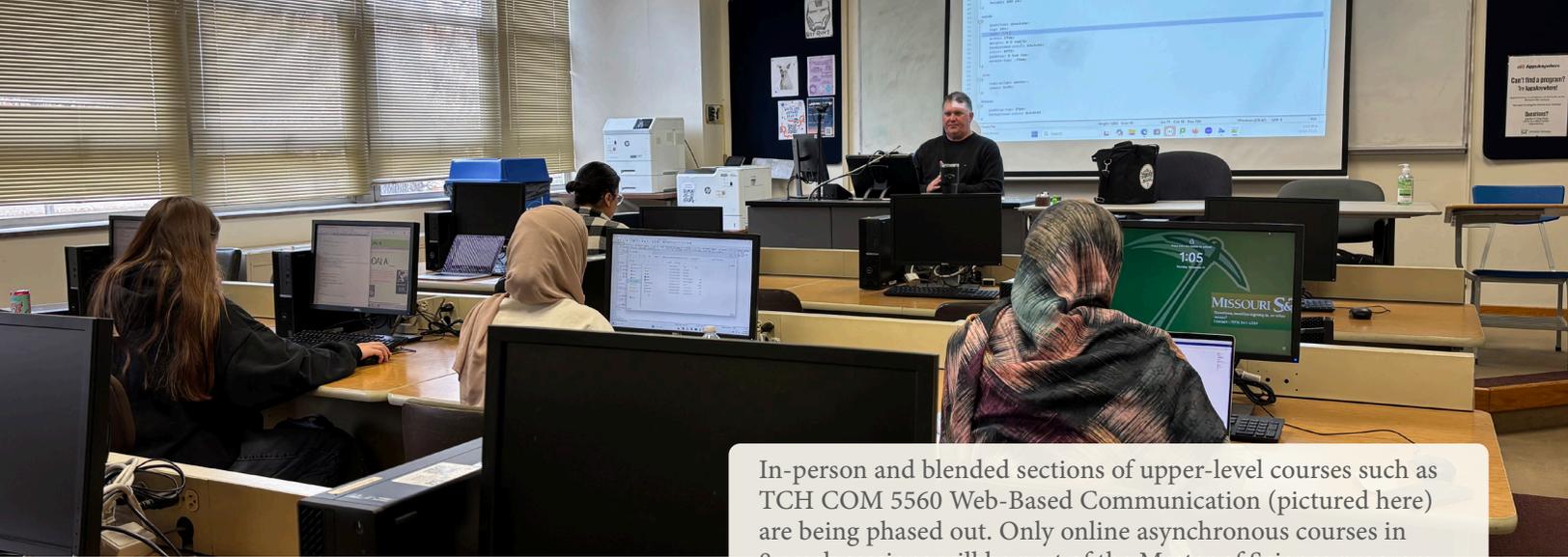
Between workshops, Northcut held office hours to provide individual feedback on grant proposals and research. One memorable exchange involved engineering students preparing proposals as part of a competition on how to improve a polluted local pond. "They were all so motivated to participate," Northcut said. "It wasn't a requirement, but a lot of students committed to it anyway." She was impressed by their initiative and enjoyed providing feedback on their proposals.

Northcut's experiences in Bangladesh underscored the value of cultural exchange in technical communication. "Dhaka was never a place I thought about visiting or working," she said. "However, I gained knowledge and experience by being there that I couldn't have by going somewhere that I was more familiar with." She learned more than expected from NSU colleagues and students and returned to Rolla with a broader perspective. In her S&T courses, she tries to help students cultivate a global perspective rather than just an American or Midwestern one.

Northcut is open to future Fulbright collaborations, although no additional travel is currently planned. The Fulbright Specialist Program maintains a network of past participants who promote opportunities and offer guidance to prospective applicants. Northcut is among them.

**"I gained knowledge and experience by being there that I couldn't have by going somewhere that I was more familiar with."**

More information about the program is available at <https://fulbrightspecialist.worldlearning.org/>.



In-person and blended sections of upper-level courses such as TCH COM 5560 Web-Based Communication (pictured here) are being phased out. Only online asynchronous courses in 8-week sessions will be part of the Master of Science program after May 2027. Already the department is moving in that direction by designing and offering such course sections.

# MS in Technical Communication Undergoes Revision

A team of professors in the ETC department is collaborating on a major revision of the Master of Science in Technical Communication. The goal is to better align the degree with today's job market and attract more self-funded students, including working professionals. Over the next year and a half, the department plans to develop new courses, revise existing ones, and significantly change the structure of the program.

"We plan for the program to be online-only and asynchronous," said Dr. David Wright, professor of technical communication. "Ideally, that transition will be completed in about a year and a half. We'll be developing courses in the meantime; some will be new, and others will be updated versions of current classes."

Asynchronous courses allow students to watch lectures, read materials, and complete assignments on their own schedules, though deadlines still apply.

The revised structure will also shift away from the traditional 16-week semester. Now that the department no longer offers graduate teaching assistantships, the M.S. will move entirely to eight-week asynchronous courses.

"The plan is eight-week courses because we are looking to target a more working-professional crowd," Wright said. "People who are working would much rather do one eight-week course and then another in the same semester."

Courses already in development include User Experience and Interface Design, Persuasive AI, and Technology and Humanity.

The full revision of the curriculum is expected to be completed by May 2027. The updated program is expected to debut in Fall 2027 with a new name that more clearly reflects its content and goals.

In the meantime, the department must continue to offer in-person or blended course sections until the last on-campus international student graduates. Federal regulations restrict international students in the U.S. from taking more than one fully online course per semester.

"If you look at the types of jobs that are being advertised, we really feel like we owe it to students," Wright said. "You want them to have the right skills to match up with the jobs that are out there now."

In 2023-2025, the department developed a proposal for a PhD program in technical communication (see the Spring 2024 issue of *Panoply*), but the proposal was rejected by the S&T administration due to cost considerations.

Missouri S&T's MS in Technical Communication was launched in January 2005. As of December 2025, 112 students have graduated from the program, including 53 international, 10 graduate track pathway, and 5 distance education. Over 70 percent of program alumni are women.

# Reardon Joins CASE Leadership

He has been described as the perfect Scrooge: “crabby, crusty, and caustic.”

Dr. Dan Reardon, former Vice Provost of Undergraduate Studies at Missouri S&T, spent the Spring 2025 semester back in his home department, English and Technical Communication, before departing once more for a new administrative role: Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in the College of Arts, Sciences, and Education.

## From Kansas City to Campus Leadership

Reardon’s path to academic leadership has been anything but typical. A Kansas City native, he grew up near Raytown, while his wife, Beth, hails from nearby Fairway, Kansas. Their son, William, was also born in Kansas City, rooting the family firmly in the Midwest.

Before joining Missouri S&T full-time, Reardon spent nearly 15 years teaching at the University of Missouri–Kansas City while also serving as primary caregiver for their son. In 2002, the family moved to the Rolla area—not for academic careers, but to start a fragrance manufacturing business, Creative Essence. Until its quietus in 2018, it had an annual operating budget of approximately \$1 million.

Reardon began teaching part-time at the University of Missouri–Rolla (now Missouri S&T) in 2003 and moved to full-time status in 2007. He entered the tenure track in 2011, earning promotion to associate professor with tenure in 2017 and full professor in 2023. Along the way, he advanced through several leadership positions, including Assistant Director of the Writing Center, Associate Chair of English and Technical Communication, and Vice Provost of Undergraduate studies.

## A Leader Who Lifts Others Up

In his current role, Reardon supports Dean Mehrzad Boroujerdi and collaborates closely with department chairs. “What I like best about my job,” he shared, “is helping other people do theirs more effectively.” From solving challenges to guiding faculty through administrative needs, he views his position as one that enables others to succeed.



Dr. Dan Reardon reviews administrative materials in his office as Associate Dean in CASE.

Beyond leadership, he continues to nurture his love for the classroom. Each semester, Reardon teaches a course—currently his favorite, Fantasy Literature—keeping him connected to students and the teaching experience that first sparked his career.

## A Family Legacy at Missouri S&T

The Reardons’ connection to Missouri S&T runs deep. Reardon’s wife, Beth, serves as the university’s Canvas learning management system expert and coordinator for educational software programs. With a master’s degree in technical communication from S&T, Beth helps faculty develop their online courses and learning materials.

Their son, William, also followed the S&T path, completing both his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in technical communication through the graduate-track-pathway program. Today, he works remotely for Hitachi on Google’s Guardian AI team, developing

natural and human-like language systems and even teaches part-time at S&T. “They make me look good because they’re the ones doing the hard work,” Reardon joked proudly.

### Theater in His Blood

Many years ago, Reardon earned a BA in Speech and Theatre from Avila College in Kansas City. Even as his studies shifted toward English literature, he remained deeply involved in theater work. “With a theatrical career spanning decades, he has worn nearly every hat—from director to set, light, and sound designer, stage manager, and carpenter,” noted a press release from the Cedar Street Players in Rolla.

He boasts 14 acting credits since 2018, ranging from bit parts to lead roles. For Fine Linen Theatre and Ozark Actors Theatre in Rolla, he portrayed Lazar Wolf in *Fiddler on the Roof* (2018), Mr. Gardiner in *Pride and Prejudice* (2020), and Maurice in *Beauty and the Beast* (2024). His standout role was as Ebenezer Scrooge in his stage adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*. Reviewer Paige Timer of the *Phelps County Focus*

called him “everything you want Scrooge to be—crabby, crusty, and caustic.”

### The Power of Communication

Reardon emphasizes the versatility and impact of English and technical communication. He often encourages students to ask employers one key question: “Are you hiring communication specialists?” Nearly every company answers affirmatively with enthusiasm.

“Technical communication covers everything from graphic design to digital media,” he explained. His upcoming book explores the evolution of instruction manuals in video games—from printed guides to digital tutorials and Let’s Play videos. “It’s a fascinating look at how players now teach players through digital media,” he said.

For Reardon, technical communication represents the intersection of creativity, clarity, and connection. “Our graduates are the experts who make what manufacturers do understandable and marketable to customers,” he said. “It’s the best of all possible worlds in communication.”

At Missouri S&T’s annual award luncheon held on December 3rd, three Department of English and Technical Communications faculty were recognized for outstanding performance in both teaching and academic service. Dr. Rachel Schneider was awarded the Faculty Achievement Award for her continued commitment to teaching, research, and service. Dr. Kathryn Northcut and Professor Mathew Goldberg were awarded the Faculty Teaching Award in recognition of their commitment to undergraduate- and graduate-level instruction. The recognition is a testament to the ETC department’s focus on creative and effective teaching and student engagement as well as its collaborative approach to providing academic leadership.



# The Heartland Shapes Research

## A Missouri Native Turns Midwest Stories into Meaningful Teaching

When Dr. Joshua Coonrod walks into a classroom at Missouri S&T, he has more than a lesson plan. He brings a curiosity about how people communicate, a love of writing that began in his hometown of Rolla, and an interest in research for horror films that stretches from low-budget festivals in Indiana to broader cultural debates about the Midwest itself.

Now in his second year as an assistant teaching professor of English and technical communication, Coonrod teaches a range of courses, including composition, public speaking, and occasionally horror literature and film. He sees each course as an opportunity to encourage and show students how to think critically, not just about the subject at hand, but about the broader questions underlying it.

“The main thing I want students to take away is to be contemplative,” Coonrod says. “Whether it’s a speech, a research paper, or even a horror movie, I want them to ask: Why this? What does it mean? Where does the information come from?”

Coonrod grew up in Rolla and always gravitated toward writing. He recalls filling his time by reading

journals and stories, even when there weren’t many outlets for young writers in a small town. “Whenever I got the chance to visit St. Louis or another city, I’d immediately want to stop at a bookstore,” he says. “Writing was both something I enjoyed and something that helped me imagine larger worlds beyond my own.”

That early love of writing led him to journalism, with stops at the *Rolla Daily News* and the *Columbia Missourian*. He quickly realized the newsroom wasn’t the best fit for him. The fast pace and rigid style limited the kind of exploration he wanted to do with ideas. Graduate school in English and communication opened new doors, allowing him to connect writing with cultural analysis, and eventually, with horror films.

At Missouri S&T, Coonrod has adapted his teaching style to students who arrive with varying levels of enthusiasm for public speaking and writing. His strategy? Passion and practice.

“I tell students to find the topic they can’t stop talking about,” he explains. “If you’re excited about it,



Dr. Josh Coonrod, assistant teaching professor, engages with students in SP&M S 1185 Principles of Speech. On this particular day, he was lecturing

about the three artificial proofs: logos (the rational appeal), pathos (the emotional appeal), and ethos (the appeal through character).

your audience probably will be, too. And then it's just about repetition, getting up there enough times until it feels natural."

Even in his horror classes, Coonrod connects storytelling to structure, encouraging students to see the overlap between writing an essay and analyzing a film. "I'm a structural guy," he admits. "Even when we're talking about Frankenstein or slasher films, I want students to make clear points that connect to a larger argument. It's the same skill you need in a composition course."

Coonrod's research focuses on the cultural role of horror, particularly in independent filmmaking. While completing his Ph.D. at Indiana University, he immersed himself in a local horror film festival in which small-budget filmmakers screened movies made with little more than personal savings and creativity.

"These weren't Hollywood blockbusters," he says. "They were films made for \$10,000, distributed on DVDs at convention or mailed to festivals in Germany or Australia. Sometimes they even get banned overseas. I was fascinated by how these communities worked, people making movies because they loved horror, not because it was profitable."

Lately, he has turned his attention closer to home, studying how the Midwest is represented in horror.

From the eerie farmhouses of *Children of the Corn* to the isolated small towns of *Clown in a Cornfield*, the "Heartland" often becomes shorthand for vulnerability, emptiness, or menace.

"As someone from Rolla, I find it interesting to see how horror depicts the Midwest," Coonrod notes. "Sometimes it looks like fields and dirt roads, sometimes like burned-out towns. But of course, the Midwest also has cities like Chicago or St. Louis. I want to explore what it means when horror reduces it to just one version of itself."

Whether he's in the classroom coaching students through their first speech or at a conference presenting on horror fandoms, Coonrod sees communication as the thread tying it all together. Stories, whether spoken, written, or filmed, help people make sense of themselves and their communities.

And for Coonrod, Missouri S&T is an ideal place to continue asking those questions. "I've taught at other universities, but here I see students who are eager to engage once they realize they can bring their own interests into the work," he says. "That's what excites me, the moment when they realize their voice matters, whether they're writing an essay, giving a speech, or just figuring out why we keep coming back to Frankenstein."

Dr. Trent Brown, professor of American studies, has taught ENGL 2230 Literature and Film for many years. An elective for many students and required for the Film and Literature minor, it remains one of the department's most popular courses, alongside ENGL 2243 Science Fiction and ENGL 2244 Fantasy Literature.

The author of *Ed King's Mississippi* (2014) and *Roadhouse Justice* (2022), Brown specializes in 20th-century U.S. cultural history and literature, with particular focus on race and gender in the modern South. He is currently working on three book projects: a volume on Lynyrd Skynyrd's *Street Survivors* for Bloomsbury's 33 1/3 series (2027); a narrative history of Mississippi for the University Press of Mississippi (due 2026); and *Murder at Ole Miss: The Jean Gillies Case* for the University of Tennessee Press (Fall 2026).



# Research Team Studies User Reception of Apple Vision Pro

## How do everyday users actually respond to Apple Vision Pro?

Augmented reality promises to change how we shop, relax, and work—but will it really? In 2025, Dr. David Wright, professor of technical communication at Missouri S&T, set out with colleague Dr. Daniel Shank and undergraduate researcher Julien Hanson to explore whether everyday users are ready to embrace AR in their daily lives.

The team examined Apple Vision Pro, a new augmented reality headset marketed for consumer use. Apple promoted the device not just for specialized applications but for everyday activities such as shopping, movie watching, workspace design, and furniture arrangement. The study tested whether users would embrace AR for these routine tasks or continue to rely on familiar tools like smartphones, laptops, and televisions.

“Technology only matters if people find it useful,” Wright said. “My research has always looked at how people actually live with technology, whether it simplifies their lives or adds frustration. The Vision Pro gave us the chance to test that in a completely new way.”

Wright’s prior work with smart-home systems informed the project. Those studies showed how convenience, control, and trust influence willingness to adopt new technology, and the same themes resurfaced in this exploration of AR.

To evaluate how people respond to the Vision Pro, the research team conducted a study with seventy-two undergraduate participants. Each student completed six tasks: watching a movie, taking photos, configuring a workspace, shopping online, arranging virtual furniture, and building with virtual LEGO bricks. Participants then shared their impressions, providing both quantitative and qualitative feedback.

The results showed that context plays a significant



Dr. David Wright in the psychology lab holding Apple Vision Pro.

role in AR acceptance. Students strongly preferred real LEGO bricks over virtual ones, noting the importance of tactile play. They also found the headset awkward for photography compared to the simplicity of a phone. “The feeling of real Lego bricks is part of the enjoyment,” one participant said. Others described taking pictures with the headset as bulky or awkward.

When AR clearly simplified or enhanced a task, however, participants responded positively. More than 70 percent preferred the Vision Pro for arranging furniture because they could visualize and move items without heavy lifting. Movie watching was also well received because of the ability to scale a virtual screen to wall size for an immersive theater-like experience. Online shopping also scored well, as participants appreciated previewing clothes on 3D mannequins rather than relying on flat product photos.

Participants drew a firm line between novelty and usefulness. As Wright noted, “When AR adds real value, when it makes a task easier, more immersive, or more creative, people prefer it. But if it just replaces something they already do easily, like taking a photo, they don’t see the point.”

The project connects directly to technical communication and human-computer interaction.

The Vision Pro introduces a new way of using technology, relying on eye-tracking and hand gestures rather than keyboards or touchscreens. While students learned the controls quickly, many found them imprecise or frustrating. These struggles highlighted the need for clear instructions and user-friendly design, which are central concerns for technical communicators.

Equity and ethics remain central concerns. At \$3,500, the Vision Pro is beyond the reach of most consumers. Wright hopes prices will fall but emphasizes the need for inclusive design, particularly for people with disabilities.

Privacy is another challenge. AR could be misused for surveillance by instantly identifying people without their consent. “That’s not science fiction anymore,” Wright said. “It’s a real ethical challenge.”

The project received funding from two Missouri S&T sources: the Center for Science, Technology, and Society and the Intelligent Systems Center.

“Collaboration was essential,” Wright said. “Dr. Shank brought social psychology to the table, and

Julien contributed as a sharp and motivated student researcher. Together, we captured a more complete picture of how people experience AR.”

Wright expects progress in AR hardware to be a key factor in broader adoption. “The headset is powerful, but it is big, heavy, and expensive,” he said. “Within the next decade, I expect that same power in a pair of glasses.”

His next project will focus on smart glasses, which promise many of the same capabilities in a lighter and more affordable form. This research will examine usability as well as critical issues such as privacy, safety, and accessibility. Questions include whether people will feel comfortable holding conversations while wearing smart glasses and how much complexity users are willing to tolerate before abandoning a device.

“We’re at the beginning of a transformation,” Wright said. “Our role is to make sure that transformation improves lives and that people know how to use these tools in meaningful and ethical ways.”



Lilian Abirika (graduate research assistant) is assembling a grill using the AVP in a pilot study, while Julien Hanson (undergraduate research assistant) observes.

# Communication Professor Uses Play and Innovation to Teach Crucial Skills

“If you are ever trying to find me in the H-SS building, just follow the noise. It’s probably me.”



Lisa Pavia-Higel leads an interactive class, using play-based activities and discussion to help students build communication skills, confidence, and collaborative thinking in the classroom.

Lisa Pavia-Higel teaches Principles of Speech and Interpersonal Communication for mostly non-major students, the ones who may not be in class for the joy of learning. She says her main job is to get her students excited about what they can gain by studying communication. “So much of what I do is about getting buy-in. If you can’t communicate your ideas clearly, you won’t be as successful as you might otherwise be.”

This is a kind of magic: taking those amazing ideas in your head and somehow getting them into somebody else’s. Pavia-Higel enjoys helping her world-changing students figure out how to find their unique voices and tell their stories. She tries to bridge the gap for career-focused students by showing them how the skills directly connect to what they want to

achieve. For her, the bigger goal is not just about skills; it’s about teaching students how to think, not what to think. This philosophy shapes the methods she brings into the classroom.

## “The Playful Professor”

“I always tell them we’re going to do weird things in here. We’re going to play games, move around the room, or compete with one another for silly prizes. I always offer to show them the research behind my methods if they are interested.”

Pavia-Higel often points to the book *The Professor at Play*, which uses research-backed methods to bring play and interaction into the classroom. It’s not just random games; it’s active, hands-on learning with a clear purpose. She works hard to make sure

everything in class carries an added layer of meaning, focusing on creating a “genuinely welcoming environment for everyone.”

One big innovation is her use of small semi-permanent teams, called feedback groups. Students work in these teams throughout the semester to practice interpersonal communication, build confidence, and learn how to collaborate effectively.

Her classroom experiments also include high-tech innovations. For an ethical speech activity, she designed a chatbot called DaveBot, who insists on doing a speech on a controversial topic in a way to ‘get a rise’ out of the audience. Students must then play the role of the teacher and encourage him to act ethically in his approach.”

Some of her AI-savvy students have even volunteered to help her develop DaveBot to make it more challenging in the future. “I’m trying to sell creativity and innovation as a career success skill,” she says.

When it comes to in-class interaction, Pavia-Higel rewards failure. You may see her with a sheet of stickers in class. She hands them out for effort, for showing up, for wrong answers, for best effort, active participation, thoughtful guessing, and supportive behaviors that help their classmates. At the end of the semester, the feedback group with the most stickers gets extra credit. Her philosophy is simple: the classroom should be failure-friendly.

### **From the YMCA to Missouri S&T**

After completing her first master’s degree at Webster University, Pavia-Higel applied her communication

training at the Gateway Region YMCA, working in public relations and membership marketing. During this period, she also taught her first college course as an adjunct instructor at St. Louis Community College. “After that class I was hooked,” she says. “I knew this was what I wanted to do!”

Her full-time academic career began in 2008 at East Central College, where she taught for nearly five years before moving to Jefferson College and teaching for more than 11 years. While at Jefferson, she completed a second master’s degree at Webster University. She is now in her second year at Missouri S&T.

Over the years, she also gained practical experience in stage storytelling, theater, and filmmaking, and operated small creative businesses. These experiences shape her hands-on, performance-informed approach to teaching, making her courses lively, practical, and engaging.

### **Her Mission in the Department and Beyond**

Pavia-Higel hopes to expand the Department of English and Technical Communication’s social media presence to benefit the community and share knowledge beyond the academy. As a member of the newly established Public Scholars Network and a published author in *The Conversation* ([theconversation.com](http://theconversation.com)), she approaches communication as a unique human skill, essential for empathy, connection, and even political depolarization. Her mission is to foster kindness, compassion, and perspective-taking, both in the classroom and in society.

Samantha Warren, an alumna of our department, works full-time on campus. In this photo, she is conferring with Sylvia Skouby, Associate Director for Online Admissions. Warren graduated from the BS in English and Technical Communication, with a marketing minor, in Fall 2024.



# Designing Across Cultures

## Three Students Reimagine Communication for Iran's Future

When graduate student Nadia Ahmadi first began teaching English in Iran more than a decade ago, she noticed something troubling. Her students could master grammar and vocabulary, yet they still struggled to understand everyday documents — from school forms to government notices — written in their own language.

“Some exam forms or government documents used overly complex phrasing that even advanced learners found



Nadia

difficult,” she recalls. “How information is presented can either empower or block people.”

That realization ultimately led her to Missouri S&T’s technical communication program, where she is now studying how culture, design, and language intersect to shape public understanding.

Nadia and her Iranian classmates, Bahar Gholinejad-Pirbazari and Saba Moazeni, are among dozens of international students, past and present, who have come to Missouri S&T to study technical communication.

### Clarity as Empowerment

With a BA in English Translation and an MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Nadia spent 13 years teaching students across age groups and published research on plagiarism in academic writing. Over time, she noticed patterns — not simply in how people wrote, but in how institutions failed to communicate effectively.

“In Iran, public information is often authority-driven,” she explains. “The tone assumes the audience will comply rather than engage.”

Hospital consent forms stand out as an example. “They were long, full of legal jargon, and rarely explained in plain Persian. Families often signed without understanding.”

Studying technical communication at S&T introduced



Bahar

her to new concepts that feel transformational. “User personas completely shifted my thinking. Now I focus less on the rules of writing and more on what the reader needs.”

Her goal is to redesign bureaucratic forms that frustrate millions daily. Clearer structure, she believes, would not only save time but “improve public trust.”

### Designing for a Digital Future

For fellow student Bahar, the most pressing communication challenges in Iran now exist online.

“Digital communication is

getting bigger every day,” she says. “Phones and technology are becoming more common, even for people who resisted them before.”

Iran’s digital ecosystem, however, has limitations. Internet access is inconsistent, and international software—including widely used design tools—is often inaccessible due to sanctions. As a result, the leap toward modern digital literacy has been rapid, uneven, and sometimes overwhelming.

“If you are not a tech-savvy person, many essential apps are very difficult,” she notes. Her own father prefers to buy a Wi-Fi plan in person rather than struggle through a confusing interface. “The design often doesn’t consider the non-expert user.”

Still, Bahar sees tremendous potential, especially in education. Having taught previously, she wants to improve online learning access through better communication design.

“People back home don’t yet fully know the essence of online teaching,” she says. “I want to build strategies and content that make education accessible and effective for everyone.”

### Tradition as Design Language

While Nadia and Bahar focus on usability and infrastructure, Saba emphasizes the ways culture infuses communication in Iran, especially visually.

“Poetry is huge in Iran,” she says. “Communication is often based on emotion. Even a company logo must connect with heritage to be understood.”

As a calligraphy instructor and

literature scholar, Saba understands how deeply symbolism shapes Iranian understanding of space, color, and identity. She gestures to her scarf, which is a vibrant Persian blue.

“Color means a lot in our culture. Every line in a design can speak volumes. If something uses Persian patterns or calligraphy thoughtfully, we can immediately tell it’s for us.”

She cautions that adopting Western minimalism without cultural context could make communication among Iranians feel foreign rather than familiar.

“Some think removing cultural elements will make designs accepted worldwide,” she says. “But our cultural identity is our strength. Respecting difference means placing tradition within a modern framework.”

### Missouri S&T as Turning Point

Despite their different perspectives, all three students see their time at Missouri S&T as a turning point—not only professionally, but personally.

“This program has already made me consciously aware of the differences in opportunity and approach,” Saba reflects. “I am building a new framework that combines the deep understanding I have of my culture with the strategic principles I am learning here.”

For Nadia, the biggest shift is recognizing intent behind design. “Information hierarchy would have changed so many things I struggled with back home.”



Saba

And for Bahar, it is a confidence that skillful communication can reduce barriers and expand opportunity, particularly as technology evolves.

“I want to use what I’m learning in technical communication to expand access in Iran,” she says. “It’s about connection, making sure people aren’t left behind.”

Whether improving public forms, strengthening mobile usability, or blending tradition with innovation, each of these students envisions a future in which communication is not simply functional, but also respectful, empowering, and culturally aware.

Nadia sums up their shared perspective eloquently: “Communication should help people, not confuse them.”

# Stovall Aims High in the NBA and TC



Missouri S&T's Cameron Stovall (10) goes up for a dunk during a home game at Gibson Arena. The sophomore ETC major balances his drive on the court with his passion for technical communication.

Cameron Stovall, a student-athlete at Missouri S&T, is determined to succeed, and that determination shapes both his academic and athletic commitments. Hailing from downtown St. Louis, he now calls Rolla home, where he splits his time between the classroom and the basketball court.

Stovall is a sophomore majoring in English and technical communication (ETC) with a minor in game studies. Although he began his studies just a few semesters ago, in Fall 2023, he already demonstrates the focus of a seasoned competitor.

## Balancing Sports and Studies

Stovall's decision to attend Missouri S&T came after receiving a scholarship. "I was blessed to receive a scholarship from S&T," he explained. "When I got here, I noticed all the different opportunities you could gain. I love that about this school."

With five courses each semester, Stovall's schedule is anything but simple. His day is a careful balance of

classes, workouts, and team activities. "Some days we start with conditioning in the morning, then I head straight to class," he shared. "In the evenings, I hit lifts before wrapping up schoolwork. Since we're still in preseason, it's a lot of training and preparation right now."

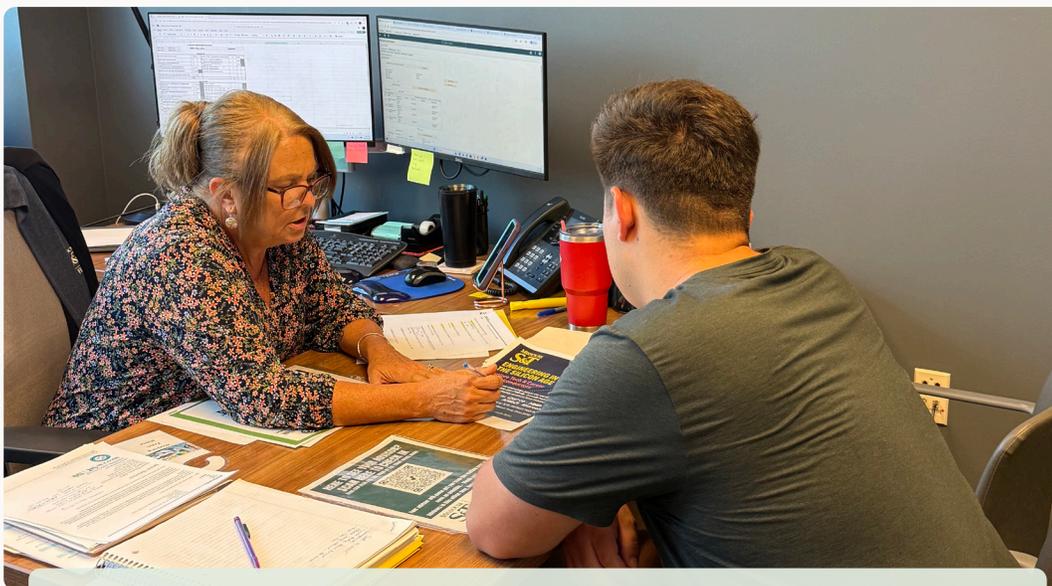
Though the workload is heavy, he embraces the challenge. The discipline of basketball fuels his dedication in the classroom, and his passion for his studies pushes him to work just as hard off the court.

## Plans Beyond the Court

While basketball is a major part of his identity and pursuing the dream of playing overseas or even in the NBA is a top priority, Stovall is equally serious about his academic goals. "I'd love to work with companies like Microsoft or Sony and use my game studies background to get into those industries," he said. "That's the backup plan, but really, it's more than that—I love ETC, too."

continued on page 23

# Alumna Leads S&T Advising Center



McMillen works with advisee Jimmy Odom, a computer engineering major.

As director of Missouri S&T's Advising Center, Amy McMillen (MS Tech Com, 2020) ensures that the center provides high-quality, student-centered academic advising that supports the needs of S&T students. Her work is built on clear communication, teamwork, and a real care for student success.

Since beginning her career at Missouri S&T in 1996, McMillen has served students in a variety of advising and support roles, except for a seven-year gap at a regional planning commission that strengthened her communication and project management skills. After returning to campus in 2014 as a graduate studies advisor, she entered the technical communication graduate certificate program in 2017 and later applied that coursework toward an MS degree (2019–2020).

She had her moments of doubt and uncertainty about whether she should continue with her education, but a conversation with Dr. Ed Malone, professor of technical communication, kept her from dropping out, and she went on to graduate with a 3.9 GPA. Her graduate studies helped her learn how to communicate and support students more effectively. "I've learned to use communication to establish a better rapport with my students and by getting to know them as people first, rather than just as students, I can help them more in my job."

As she began the certificate program, she transitioned to the Advising Center as a senior academic advisor, applying her growing communication expertise to strengthen student support and assume greater leadership responsibilities.

While working as senior academic advisor, McMillen was involved in the University of Missouri System's Advisor Development Program (ADP), a collaborative initiative through which she exchanged advising techniques and explored new approaches to student support. She also mentored and supported advisors who later presented their projects at conferences such as NACADA, the global community for academic advising. She remains involved with the program, representing Missouri S&T on the ADP Planning Committee.

In January 2022, McMillen became Director of the S&T Advising Center. She manages a group of academic advisors, an assistant, and a team of student mentors, helping to sustain and strengthen a student-centered environment at the University. Her leadership in the center allows it to grow programs that foster academic success, unity, and professional development for advisors and students.

In her first three years as director, McMillen oversaw the On Track Academic Success Program, a peer-led initiative designed to support students on

academic probation. During that period, participating students raised their GPAs by nearly a full point on average.

Her philosophy of leadership is collaboration and empathy. “If you don’t have a great team, you can’t be a great leader.” She believes that many of today’s challenges can be solved with effective communication, something that guides both her advising and her leadership.

McMillen enjoys meeting students where they are and helping them reach their goals. She believes that every student is unique and different. “I remember I saw a meme, it was a bag of popcorn, and it said you can put kernels in the same pan with the same heat, but they all pop at different times. That’s how I try to approach working with my students.” She encourages students to ask for help when needed and ensures it is seen as a sign of strength, not weakness.

For Technical Communication students, McMillen advises that they should recognize the power of communication. “I would give everyone that piece of advice: communicate with other people, learn as much as you can.” She encourages them to practice effective and efficient communication. She also enjoys being part of Missouri S&T’s diverse community and finds inspiration in the ideas students share.

Just as she supports her students and colleagues, McMillen cherishes the close connections within her own family. She has two adult sons and a grandson who always brings joy when they gather. Family remains a central part of her life.

## Professional Experience

- **1996–2006**  
Secretary, Regional Professional Development Center, Missouri S&T  
Senior Secretary, Alumni Association, Missouri S&T
- **2007–2014**  
Environmental Program Specialist & Project Manager, Meramec Regional Planning Commission (Region I Homeland Security grants)
- **2014–2016**  
Graduate Studies Specialist/Advisor, Office of Graduate Studies
- **2016–2021**  
Senior Academic Advisor, Missouri S&T Advising Center
- **2022–present**  
Director, Missouri S&T Advising Center, and Assistant Director of Student Support Services, Missouri S&T

continued from page 21

### Why English and Technical Communication?

For Stovall, ETC offers more than just a safety net; it represents possibility. His minor in game studies is part of the technical communication program, where courses explore how design, storytelling, and technology intersect. “What fascinates me about English and technical communication is the diversity. You can get into consulting, engineering firms, or all sorts of different companies. There are so many routes you can take.”

He also values the essential role communication plays in technical fields. Reflecting on advice from a professor, he added, “Engineers speak in their own

language, but we translate that into something everyday people understand. We make jargon accessible, and I think that’s powerful.”

### Looking Ahead

From early mornings of conditioning to long evenings of studying, Stovall is living the student-athlete life to its fullest. Whether it’s on the court chasing championships or in classrooms preparing for a career in technical communication, he’s committed to the grind. “At the end of the day,” he said with a smile, “I love having all these opportunities in front of me.”

**WELCOME  
TO OUR TEAM  
OF INNOVATORS  
SAM GEORGE**

**CASEMAX**

**Sam George  
Technical Writer**



Sam George began his professional career last year as a technical writer at Casemax, where he draws on skills he developed in Missouri S&T's English and Technical Communication programs. Now, as an alumnus, he offers current ETC students some advice.

## George Encourages Students to Listen and Adapt

Sam George earned a Bachelor of Science in English and Technical Communication in May 2024 and completed a Master of Science in Technical Communication just one year later through the department's Graduate Track Pathway program, which allowed him to bring nine shared credits into the MS.

During his time at S&T, George built a strong foundation through involvement in Southwinds, an OURE research project on language ideologies with Dr. Sarah Hercula, internships with The Toro Company and WireCo, and a graduate teaching assistantship in which he independently taught a section of English 3560 Technical Writing. "Internships, clubs, and student activities really helped me gain confidence and skills that apply to my work," he said.

He underscored a student's responsibility to listen attentively. "Everyone in the department has a valuable perspective on communication," he said. "Professors don't teach unless they want to share their knowledge. If you really listen, you'll discover what each one is trying to help you understand."

For his part, he cultivated several key habits

through his coursework and extracurricular activities: listening, observation, critical thinking, and adaptation. "Learning how to adapt to every situation will really help you when entering the workforce," he said.

Today, George works as a technical writer at Casemax, a case-management company that supports law firms in organizing and securing information for legal cases. In his role, he develops training materials for legal assistants, tests beta software, and collaborates across departments to ensure processes are clearly documented.

George offered several pieces of advice for current English and Technical Communication students:

- Learn as much as you can.
- Communicate with everyone.
- Find value in whatever you work on.
- Adapt to your surroundings.
- Observe everything.

He noted that these practices helped him make the most of his opportunities at S&T, and he believes they can help current students make the most of theirs as well.

# Alumna Nora Potrafka Works at Mastercard

Even before the Fall 2017 semester began, Nora (Dunn) Potrafka chose English as a major because she loved communication and thought it might prepare her to be a writer or editor. A few weeks later, though, a conversation with her assigned advisor, Dr. Dan Reardon, led her to reconsider this choice.

“He encouraged me to take Introduction to Technical Communication,” Potrafka said. “He told me that tech com would bridge my love for technology and science with my communication and social skills. I enrolled in the course and, by mid-semester, decided to switch majors. I’ve stayed in tech com ever since.”

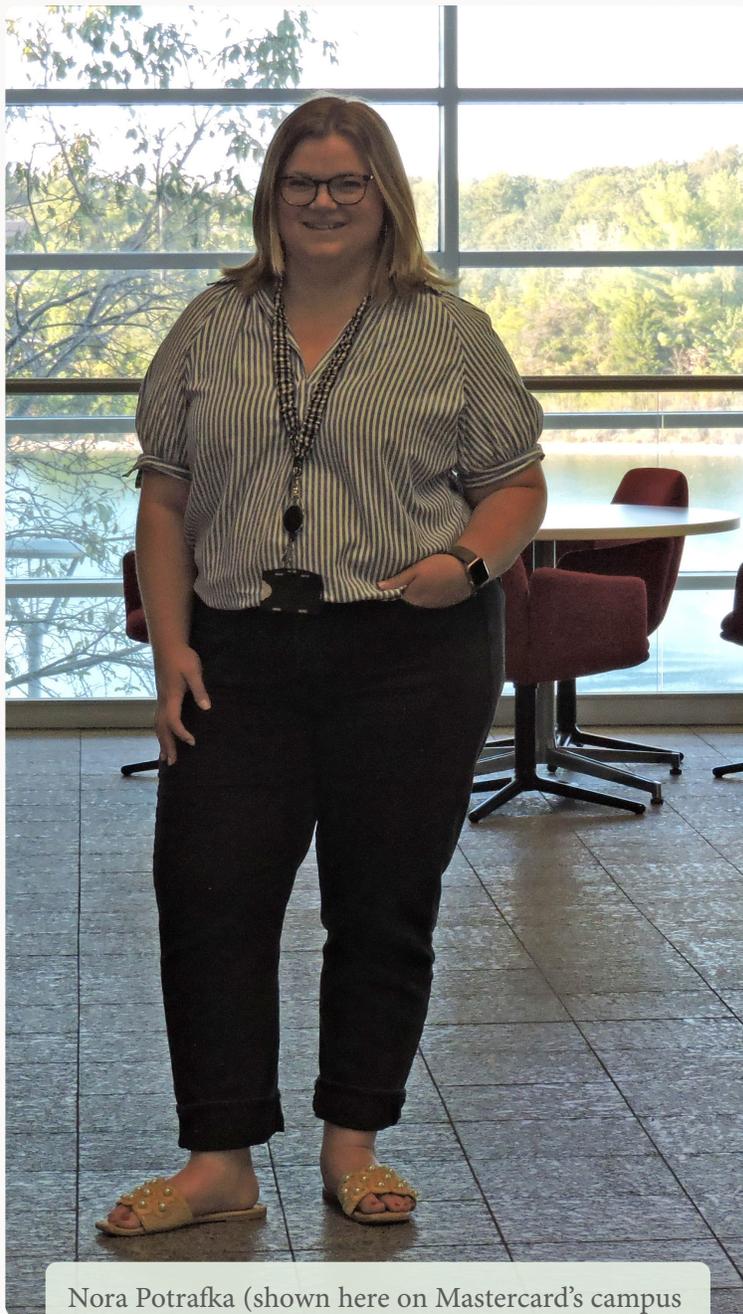
Both degree programs—the Bachelor of Arts in English and the Bachelor of Science in Technical Communication—were part of the Department of English and Technical Communication (ETC), so she spent the next five years taking ETC courses and working with ETC faculty.

Potrafka graduated with a BS in Technical Communication in Spring 2021, with minors in business, communication studies, and marketing. One year later, she completed a Master of Science in Technical Communication after following the department’s graduate track pathway that allowed double-counting nine credit hours toward the BS and the MS.

## Extracurriculars

Outside the classroom, Potrafka balanced work with a wide range of campus activities. She worked as the ETC department’s front desk receptionist throughout her undergraduate years. In that role, she coordinated with faculty to ensure syllabi were submitted on time, occasionally assisted with research projects, and answered questions from walk-in visitors.

She was also a member of Chi Omega, served on the executive board of Ignite Campus Ministry, participated in S&T’s design groups, and attended one of the university’s speech and debate competitions as an observer.



Nora Potrafka (shown here on Mastercard’s campus in O’Fallon, Missouri) encourages students to stay current with technological advancements and to learn a coding language. She believes that foundation carries well into any technical environment.

## Mastercard

“Dr. Wright also shaped my path,” she said. “He encouraged me to apply to Mastercard. I ended up there because of his encouragement.” As she prepared

to graduate, Potrafka applied for two positions in the Content Strategy and Design department in Mastercard's Global Customer Delivery & Care Division. She received a call back for one of them.

The application process involved three interviews: one with HR, one with staff in the department, and one with the hiring manager. They also requested multiple samples of work, which Potrafka selected from her technical communication courses. Her preparation showed, and she was offered the position.

Shortly after graduation, Potrafka began working as a Content Strategy Analyst at Mastercard. More specifically, she is an embedded writer. An embedded writer "means that I am dedicated to a specific program at Mastercard. Each program has different products that launch within Mastercard," Potrafka explained. The program she supports is not publicly disclosed. Her work "is to know enough about the program and the relationships between product and engineering to make those connections." Being an embedded writer also requires adaptability. "You have to be flexible and willing to ask questions, learn, and do research on your own."

Her day-to-day work varies considerably. "Every day looks different," she said. "Some days, I don't write at all because I'm in meetings from eight to four. Other days, I block out my calendar and write nonstop. I create everything from user guides and release notes to announcements and API documentation. I've even helped launch a new testing platform, where I gave input on usability and standards."

She has also taken on responsibilities she didn't anticipate. One of her biggest surprises since joining Mastercard has been becoming the Content Strategy and Design team's software expert. "I didn't realize I'd be taking on a more technical role. I thought I'd be in more of a support role, but it's opened up many learning opportunities for me. And I've really enjoyed that."

### **Future Plans and Goals**

Since starting at Mastercard, Potrafka has remained in the same content strategy role. Although she enjoys the work, she hopes to move into product

development one day, guiding a product through its early planning stages, overseeing its development, and preparing it for release to customers. That role would involve working across the full development process and ensuring that customer needs are represented at each stage.

She also hopes to author a novel. "I have a storyline in my head that I've been crafting for about a year and a half now. At some point I'll write it down and it may become published. It's definitely my creative outlet."

### **Advice for Students**

Potrafka has advice for current ETC students. "[W]riting is a tool that sharpens over time. You become a better communicator through practice, through doing it and sitting down and having other people read it and edit it."

She also cautions them not to take feedback personally. "Editing is harsh, and everybody has an opinion and that's sometimes hard to take. Your opinions are always going to be different from whoever's reading your piece of work. It's part of our human nature. We read things differently and we have different life experiences, but in technical communication writing, it's all facts."

She strongly recommends that technical communication students keep up with technology trends and learn a coding language. "Whether it's XML, CSS, HTML, or JavaScript, having that foundation helps. The syntax may not be the same, but there's some translation that matches up. It's knowledge that you can take to any job."

### **Staying Connected to S&T**

Potrafka lives in St. Louis now and still finds S&T alumni everywhere. "There are so many S&T alumni at Mastercard. I can usually find one wherever I turn in St. Louis. My director even knows Dr. Wright. It's neat to see those connections continue in unexpected ways."

She hopes to strengthen those ties one day. "Maybe I'll return for a career fair or help other students the way my professors helped me. It's exciting to think about giving back."

**“Writing is a tool that sharpens over time.”**



## **Designer**

Alanwar Aljabri

## **Faculty Advisor**

Edward A. Malone

## **Writers and Photographers**

Lilian Abirika  
Nadia Ahmadi  
Frederick Attoh  
Alexander Buerck  
Wyatt Davidson  
Manaolealii Faagutu  
Quinn Guffey  
Mia Jaegers  
Bahar Gholinejad Pirbazari

Xavier Leggett  
Saba Moazeni  
Sydney Moeller  
Haley Owens  
Emily Roberts  
Nhyira Sackey  
Faith Schaal  
Claire Smith